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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SITREP 12: WAITING FOR A RUSSIAN PULLOUT

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. As of mid-day August 18, there is no evidence that Russian troops have begun to withdraw from Georgia. The road from Tbilisi to Gori remains closed and travelers are subject to Russian roadblocks. Next international visitor to Tbilisi will be UK Foreign Secretary Miliband on August 19. Turkish planes are assisting the Georgians in fighting forest fires in Borjomi National Park. Leaders of two Georgian opposition parties issued a letter asking NATO to accelerate Georgia's integration into NATO. This sitrep covers events since the evening of August 17 (reftel). End Summary.

¶2. (C) As of 1400 Tbilisi time August 18, the Embassy has no independent information about any change in the positions of Russian troops occupying Georgian territory, despite promises by Russia's president to pull the troops back. Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria told the Ambassador that the Russians have not begun to withdraw. He said that Russian troops have in fact moved into Sachkhere, west of South Ossetia. Georgian troops near Russian positions at Akhalkori, a village on the cease-fire line have again been ordered not to engage with the Russians. The deputy chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, Anatoly Nogovitsin, is reported to have said in Moscow on August 17 that preparations for withdrawal were underway. Major General Borisov, commanding troops in Gori, is reported to have said that at least some Russian troops were moving from Tskhinvali in South Ossetia to Russia, but he added that because there are a large number of troops in the area, withdrawal could take some time. President Saakashvili addressed the nation on television and said that once Russia withdraws, Georgia is ready for talks with the Russian leadership. The Bulgarian government has reportedly offered Sofia as a location for such talks.

¶3. (C) Stephen Young, a military observer with the OSCE told the Embassy that he was unable to meet with General Kulakhmetov, head of the Russian PKF in South Ossetia as earlier planned. Young was allowed to visit Gori on August 18 along with a convoy of humanitarian aid from World Food Program and the Red Cross. He saw no signs of a Russian withdrawal, and said that in fact the Russians have erected another checkpoint on the Tbilisi side of Gori, close to Igoeti. He said that the Russians were refusing to allow journalists not accredited in Russia from visiting Gori.

¶4. (SBU) U.S. Senator Joseph Biden met with PM Gurgenedze and President Saakashvili on August 17. Gurgenedze outlined Georgia's looming balance of payment problems and asked for USG leadership to secure U.S., European and international financial institution assistance to support Georgia's macro-economic stability and reconstruction. Gurgenedze told Biden that Georgia had spent 14 percent of its foreign exchange reserves to provide liquidity to the banking system

and support the lari. He said that even if no further shocks occur, reserves will decline another 3-4 percent in the next week or so. He expects no additional new foreign investment this year needed to offset Georgia's 20 percent of GDP current account deficit.

15. (C) German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with President Saakashvili on August 17. Merkel supported Georgia's sovereignty and said that its territorial integrity must be upheld. Germany supports the French-Russian six-point agreement, she said, and insisted that Russian troops must leave in accordance with that agreement. She said that international peacekeepers should arrive as soon as possible and that corridors for humanitarian assistance to South Ossetia should be opened. President Saakashvili told Senator Biden that Merkel had said that MAP could be possible in December, although publicly she said that Germany's position on Georgia's NATO membership has not changed since the Bucharest summit and that Georgia will be expected to fulfill all its IPAP obligations. During the two leaders' press conference, Saakashvili strongly blamed South Ossetia and Russia for escalating attacks that precipitated the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali. The Georgian government released a detailed timeline of the events before and after August 8 that catalogue the increased intensity of South Ossetian shelling of Georgian villages and the insertion of Russian troops prior to the GOG's taking action.

16. (U) David Cameron, leader of Britain's Conservative Party, was in Tbilisi on August 16. He expressed the support of the British people and the British government for Georgia's independence and territorial integrity. UK Foreign Minister

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Miliband will visit Tbilisi August 19; earlier press reports that UK Prime Minister Brown would visit Tbilisi were not correct.

17. (U) South Ossetia's de facto president, Eduard Kokoity, dismissed his "government" on August 17, saying that his ministers had failed to perform their functions effectively. Boris Chochiev, formerly South Ossetia's negotiator with the Georgians, has been appointed acting de facto prime minister. Kokoity imposed a state of emergency and a 9 pm to 6 am curfew on Tskhinvali.

18. (U) Forest fires, reportedly started by Russian incendiary devices, continued to burn in Borjomi National Park. Georgian press reports claim that fires have affected 230,000 hectares forest. Turkish firefighting airplanes that were turned back from the area by Russian forces on August 16 were allowed in on August 17 and have helped to fight the fires.

19. (U) Opposition leaders David Gamkrelidze (New Rights Party) and David Usupashvili (Republican Party) issued an address to NATO Heads of State and Government requesting accelerated integration into NATO for Georgia to support the Georgian people's Euro-Atlantic choice. In the address, they argue that this is needed to ensure Georgia's sovereignty, democratic development and Euro-Atlantic values.

TEFFT